

Improving the Effectiveness of Large Class Teaching in Law Degrees

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This presentation reports on a study undertaken by 6 law lecturers as part of a project seeking to identify and implement good practice when teaching the discipline of law to large classes. Although the findings of the study are of general application, the context for the study was staff and student experiences in large classes taught in the School of Law at the University of Canterbury. The study involved a literature review, an anonymous online survey of advancing law students at the University, a similar survey of staff teaching at the law school, a series of focus groups of advancing law students already surveyed, analysis of the data, and development of good practice guidelines. A key finding of the study is that there is no one “good practice” method for teaching skills to students. A further key finding was that students’ views on their learning should be sought and trusted. In this study there was a clear correlation between the views expressed by students and the findings emerging from legal education literature. Outcomes from the project have been a review of existing literature, a report for the Council of Legal Education, a journal article and a set of good practice guidelines for the teaching of core law courses. The group has also begun trialling new teaching practices, with immediate observed positive effects, supported by unsolicited student testimonials. Changes are ongoing and it is intended to develop the project further to more accurately measure outcomes.